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The Language of Love: Swedish Sex Education in 1970s London

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Abstract

In 1974 the British Board of Film Censors (BBFC) refused to grant a certificate to the Swedish documentary *More About the Language of Love* (*Mera ur Kärlekens språk*, 1970, Torgny Wickman, Sweden: Swedish Film Production), due to its explicit sexual content. Nevertheless, the Greater London Council (GLC) granted the film an 'X' certificate so that could be shown legally in cinemas throughout the capital. This article details the trial against the cinema manager and owners, after the film was seized by police under the charge of obscenity, and explores the impact this had on British arguments around film censorship, revealing a range of attitudes towards sex and pornography. Drawing on archival records of the trial, the widespread press coverage, as well as participants' subsequent reflections, the article builds upon Elisabet Björklund's work on Swedish sex education films and Eric Schaefer's scholarship on Sweden's 'sexy nation' reputation to argue that the Swedish films' transnational distribution complicated tensions between educational and exploitative intentions in a particularly British culture war over censorship.

Keywords

Sex education, Swedish cinema, film censorship, distribution, politics, pornography

1975 was a notable year for prolific distributor Edwin John Fancey, most commonly known as E. J. Having built up a distribution empire from the early 1940s, he was now approaching retirement and had passed the day-to-day running of his companies to his children: Adrienne and Malcolm Fancey were controlling New Realm Entertainments and S. F. Film Distributors, and Charles Negus-Fancey and Judith Smith were running Border Films with their mother Olive Negus-Fancey. The Fanceys achieved their greatest financial and critical success in 1975 with the UK release of *Emmanuelle* (1974, Just Jaeckin, France: Orphée Productions) through New Realm Pictures. In contrast, Olive Negus-Fancey, E. J. Fancey's common-law wife, was convicted for obscenity over a legal screening of the Swedish sex

education film *More About the Language of Love* (*Mera ur Kärlekens språk*, 1970, Torgny Wickman, Sweden: Swedish Film Production). As one critic pointed out at the time, 'Nobody makes a sex-education movie like the Swedes. And nobody – but nobody – will make such a supercilious fuss about it more than the British Establishment'.¹

This article discusses how mid-twentieth-century Swedish sex education films, in particular *More About the Language of Love* and *Language of Love* (*Ur kärlekens språk*, 1969, Torgny Wickman, Sweden: Swedish Filmproduction Investment) were distributed as entertainment in British cinemas. These films became the focus of moralists' campaigns including one orchestrated by Frank Pakenham (known as Lord Longford), and were widely discussed in the press. Elisabet Björklund has written extensively on the history of these films within Sweden, but this case study offers an opportunity to look at their British reception and treatment in the hands of distributors, the censors, the press and the courts. The BBFC and GLC censorship records suggest that the interpretation of the educational versus exploitative intentions, inflected by British distributors' decisions in marketing and editing content, to be the chief feature of the British reception. Furthermore, I argue, the political outcry reflects a tension between liberal and conservative sexual attitudes particular to early 1970s British culture.

Censorship, Nation, Sex Education Films

Before turning to the censorship history of *Language of Love* films, I need to sketch the criss-crossed lines of British film regulation in the early 1970s. Despite their name, the British Board of Film Censors above all aimed to help film companies avoid prosecution; by rejecting a film they felt could be charged with obscenity they were actually protecting the film industry. Identifying an offending film was no easy task, but first principles foresaw that:

No film shall be exhibited at a licensed cinema which is likely to encourage or incite to crime, lead to disorder or to stir up hatred against any section of the public in Great Britain on grounds of colour, race, ethnic or national origins or the effect of which, if taken as a whole, is such as to tend to deprave and corrupt persons who are likely to see it.²

As was common practice amongst distributors in London, if a film was refused a certificate by the BBFC it was submitted for a certificate to the Greater London Council (GLC) for

consideration. Owing to the peculiar nature of film censorship in Britain – both then and now – local councils have the ultimate responsibility over films may run in cinemas. As such the local authority is at liberty to issue certifications of its own; the BBFC, , as established in 1912, has functioned as an advisory board, albeit one whose certificates councils have generally accepted as a way to outsource classification decisions for theatrical exhibitions. The GLC were the largest and most significant local authority regarding film in the United Kingdom, as there were 234 licensed cinemas under their jurisdiction at this time, which was approximately one-seventh of the total number of cinemas in Britain.³ Because of this critical mass, the GLC found favour among distributors as a second instance to circumvent the decisions of the BBFC; and often other local authorities would follow their lead, issuing certificates for their respective municipalities. Occasionally, this would cause the BBFC to reverse an original decision and supply a certificate to a previously rejected film.

More About the Language of Love became embroiled in the pornography debate, although, as we shall see, definitions of pornography, and its legal status, were far from settled matters. Indeed, modes and means of interpretation abounded. Twenty years later, Linda Williams' landmark scholarly study would acknowledge similar problems in conceptualising the 'power and pleasure' of sexuality expressed in pornography, although she rejected Justice Potter Stewart's infamous 1954 equivocation: 'I don't know what it is, but I know it when I see it'.⁴ Ultimately she describes pornography as being 'a speculation about pleasure that begins . . . from a phallic perspective, journeys to the unseen world of the sexual other, and returns to tell the story'.⁵ Sexuality being presented from 'a phallic perspective' is a useful definition when used to explain the narrative thrust of non-hardcore films, but it retains less explanatory value when applied to the pornography debates over the sex education films. The *Language of Love* are just as concerned with women's sexual desires as they are with men's, albeit with imagery and a system of representation that Laura Mulvey has dubbed the male gaze.⁶ It was this form, rather than simply the content, that particularly concerned the censors.

But neither form nor content adequately explains the concerns: the controversy over the Swedish films pertained to questions of national origins and transnational modes of reception. The general public had long perceived European cinema as being more sexually open and explicit, something which, Eric Schaefer explains, stemmed in part from American and British servicemen's memories of wartime Continental exploits.⁷ Paris, with its Moulin Rouge and the can-can dancers, became emblems of France's as a sexy nation, cemented in

the English language with the terms 'French letter' and 'French-kissing'. Industry insiders rushed to exploit this national essentialism and for a while, French cinema maintained strong sexual associations, with starlets like Brigitte Bardot becoming the figurehead for erotic Europeanism in the late 1950s. Often featuring striptease and what Schaefer terms the 'observational/ retrospective mode' of viewing,⁸ these films incorporated the act of watching, reflecting the tourist experience of Paris. According to a 1954 *Sight and Sound* article seventy-two films between January and March of that year received an 'X' certificate, and of those twenty-six were French.⁹ In the public imagination, this contributed to the 'pervasive perception of French cinema as 'risqué.'¹⁰

Over time, Scandinavian producers, alongside opportunistic American producers such as Radley Metzger, followed the French model. The sex in Swedish films such as *I Am Curious – Yellow* (*Jag är nyfiken - en film i gult*, 1967, Vilgot Sjöman, Sweden: Sandrews) and *Inga* (*Jag - en oskuld*, 1968, Joseph W. Sarno, Sweden/ USA: Inskafilm, Canon Films) was seen as more honest and natural, where the girls, unlike their French counterparts, were not covered in makeup and expensive lingerie. Sweden and Denmark had created societies that were far more relaxed about sex, and this had inevitably made its way into the production of popular culture. In Sweden sex education in schools had been compulsory since 1955. Sex had changed from 'something sinful, which only promiscuous people engaged in, to becoming something natural which everyone needed in order to be happy, healthy, and satisfied members of society'.¹¹ In turn, sex in Scandinavian films offered 'rationality, modernity and naturalness' perhaps missing in the earlier French cycle.¹² In any event, these films found particular resonance among audiences in Britain and America, even if the new openness was not universally appreciated.

In order to understand the BBFC's attitude towards *More About the Language of Love*, we need to probe its immediate antecedents; in this period and others, 'precedents' formed an important part of the Board's methods of classification. Early in 1969 Adrienne Fancey, through S. F. Film Distributors, submitted the film *The Wonder of Love* (*Oswalt Kolle: Das Wunder der Liebe*, 1967, Franz Josef Gottlieb, Germany/ Switzerland: Arca-Film) to the BBFC, fitting with the Fancey's pattern of distributing exploitative documentaries. Described by the *Monthly Film Bulletin* as 'the first of a new German series on sex education . . . an attempt to provide a guide to a new sexual enlightenment', *The Wonder of Love* was based around an apparently dramatised series of the journalist Oswalt Kolle's reports.¹³ On 20

January 1969 the BBFC hosted a screening and discussion of the film with experts, psychiatrists and therapists (including popular agony aunt and television presenter Claire Raynor) in order to learn their views before making a final classification decision. According to the record of the event:

There was a full discussion in the course of which all four people expressed the opinion that there was still a great deal of ignorance among young people about sexual matters in relation to marriage relationships, and that, although probably some people would see films of this kind for the wrong reasons, they could certainly be helpful to people who were ignorant, and that for this reason they were of the opinion that in principle such films should be passed for public exhibition. They all said that if by passing such films the Board came in for criticism they would be prepared to support the Board's decision. They were all of the opinion that there was nothing in this film which they would personally want removed, although they appreciated that there were areas which suggested at least some degree of commercial exploitation.¹⁴

As a result of this support, it was agreed by BBFC Secretary (i.e. Director) John Trevelyan and BBFC President Lord Harlech that *The Wonder of Love* would be passed at 'X', with some cuts. Furthermore, it was decided that the BBFC should accept the sex-education film in principle, 'but [we] should not be more generous to sex-scenes than we would be to similar scenes in feature films. This should enable us to keep out the more extravagant exploitation.'¹⁵ This decision, prompted by the Fancy's submission, enabled the Board to consider and eventually certify films like *Language of Love* (*Ur kärlekens språk*, 1969, Torgny Wickman, Sweden: Swedish Filmproduction Investment) and *More About the Language of Love*. There was no clear definition of what exactly 'extravagant exploitation' could mean, an ambiguity that would later prove problematic.

Language of Love

Initially advertised as the film that 'Says it and Shows it all!',¹⁶ *Language of Love* had a successful, trouble-free first run in London cinemas, despite first being refused a BBFC certificate. Awarded an 'X' from the GLC, it was an opportunity for audiences to see explicit sexual imagery in the context of an educational framework. *Language of Love* was shot simultaneously in both Swedish and English,¹⁷ which seems an interesting decision for a project ostensibly intended as an educational tool in Sweden: indeed, it suggests that the filmmakers, even from the start, sought to exploit distribution opportunities abroad. In a letter to John Trevelyan in 1970, Ove Wallius of Swedish Filmproduction Investment explained that:

We are perfectly aware of the censor problem all our foreign customers have and we are trying to solve this problem by making our films in two versions. This may seem strange to you but you can be absolutely sure that even the 'hot' version will not be dirty. It is, as you say, only a question of your country's view of morality. Our directors want to be free to show life as it is and this perhaps shocks people in countries where they are not familiar with this kind of freedom. Therefore in order to save important markets we have to do some scenes in a 'cooler' version but still make them as artistic as possible.¹⁸

It is not clear from the archival material what scenes they shot in a 'cooler version' and whether there remained differences between what was shown in Sweden and what was included in the print shown in the United Kingdom. Wallius' letter goes on to stress the artistry of these films, and attempts to play down any suggestion that their films are in any way 'dirty' – although by bringing up the word in the first place, his protest arguable has the opposite effect and confirms the reader's suspicions. Bolstering Trevelyan's reputation as a man who was willing to work with and to try to understand filmmakers' intentions, he arranged to stay in Stockholm for a week in order to meet with Wallius and some of the directors working with them.

Despite being willing to accept sex education films in principle, and one examiner feeling that *Language of Love* was 'a very good film of its kind – complete sincerity – helpful to many people. Always puts emphasis on love not sex',¹⁹ the BBFC decided to leave it to individual local authorities to decide on the suitability of the film for public cinemas. So, although John Trevelyan thought it a 'sincere film which was made with the best of intentions',²⁰ he appeared reluctant to commit, being unwilling to court the controversy that he knew would undoubtedly erupt should it receive an 'X'. He even admitted that 'It is obviously sincere, and the doctors talk a good deal of sense; indeed I think it would be helpful to a number of people'. In fact, it would have been frustrating for the original distributor Peter Darville, facing the prospect of submitting the film to each individual council. Trevelyan attempted to justify this fudged position in a letter to one such local authority a year later:

Perhaps the time will come when we can gauge the attitudes of licensing authorities more accurately than we can at present; if so we can take firm decisions here. Since this Board is an independent organisation which in fact acts as an agent for licensing authorities it is obviously important for the Board to maintain the confidence of these authorities. If we passed films here and found that a large number of authorities objected to them we would obviously be putting ourselves in a very difficult position.²¹

The GLC passed *Language of Love* in late 1970 with an 'X' certificate, once some brief close-ups 'from the sequence towards the end of the film which depicts night clubs, "strippers", pornographic bookshops, mini-skirted girls, etc. in rapid succession',²² were removed.

Evidence suggests that the film was reaching its intended audience: In his autobiography John Trevelyan acknowledged, 'One elderly man told me that if he had seen this film twenty years ago his marriage and his life would have been much happier', before going on to say 'Having had to see all these films, I must be the most sexually educated man in Britain!'²³

In February 1971, however, critical response was mixed. Marjorie Bilbow described *Language of Love* as 'not pornographic: but it could be accused of being subjectively slanted to flatter the male ego and to that limited extent leaning towards sexploitation', expecting the film to 'attract big audiences both as a peepshow and as a highly informative treatise that should calm a lot of fears'.²⁴ Another felt 'it is *so* serious, *so* medically detailed, *so* honest, that the commercial cinema hardly seems the right place for it' (emphasis in original), before highlighting that 'the lovers are all very nice to look at: somehow this makes the whole thing a lot easier than it might otherwise have been'.²⁵

Ove Wallius of Swedish Filmproduction Investment continued to correspond with John Trevelyan, complaining about the British distributor Peter Darville and begging for the BBFC to change their viewpoint and award a nationwide 'X' certificate. In one reply Trevelyan points out that:

As you may possibly know there has been a great deal of publicity recently in the British press on the subjects of pornography and sex-education. This was inspired first by a Debate in the House of Lords, and, at the same time, by a sex-education film for schools to which much objection was made. In these circumstances it would be extremely unwise for us to do anything more about this film at present. I am sure you will understand.²⁶

Trevelyan seemed concerned to avoid adverse publicity. The BBFC viewed themselves as a form of buffer between the film industry and the public, or the government. In some instances, this meant making decisions in order to protect the industry from itself, which seems to be the case here. Trevelyan appeared to be willing to hold off on a certificate despite

his own feelings toward this specific case, but with a purview of the larger political constellations. Approaching his 1971 retirement, he perhaps wanted to avoid becoming embroiled in a public scandal.

By the summer of 1971 distribution had passed to Grand National Film Distributors, owing to Peter Darville's financial problems, and the BBFC were ready to reconsider their position, given the fact that many Local Authorities had passed the film with little trouble. A BBFC examiner was duly dispatched to the Jacey on Charing Cross Road to watch the film, where 'the audience was typical of that area, consisting completely of males'. He observed dryly that there was 'a rather unnatural silence during some of the more sexually specific episodes.'²⁷ What is particularly fascinating is his account of a second visit to see the film, this time at a 'good-class family type cinema' in Portsmouth. He attended an almost full house on a Saturday evening, consisting mainly of a mixed younger audience:

They obviously appeared to enjoy the film. There was no snide laughter or remarks, but some healthy laughter was raised by the thought of 'making love in boots,' the man's large moustache during the love-making and a near hysterical shout from the women during the sequence when a vibrator is set in motion.²⁸

The examiner attended the film with friends, who found it interesting and were not shocked. Having seen *Language of Love* at a 'good-class cinema' he concluded that 'sex instructional films made with integrity can be passed for viewing under a Board certificate'. In spite of the examiners conclusions, by March 1973 the BBFC had still not issued the certificate, despite 127 Local Authorities around the country having passed the film, out of the 169 it was submitted to.²⁹ After yet more negotiation between the distributor and Stephen Murphy, an 'X' certificate was finally issued on 11 July 1973. This decision is given some perspective when one considered the statistics for this year. In total the BBFC handled 646 titles in 1973: of these, 249 titles, or 49% of all films submitted (excluding documentaries), were awarded an 'X' certificate. This is a strong indication of early 1970s British cinemas' strong focus on adult audiences.³⁰ Grand National's reaction to the certificate, furthermore, demonstrates the political climate and high stakes of the certification process at that time:

I would like to thank you for all your efforts with regard to this difficult matter even though, as you are well aware, I have never agreed with your viewpoint. I am already beginning to miss our weekly arguments although I imagine it will not be too long before we are involved in a similar situation regarding MORE ABOUT THE

LANGUAGE OF LOVE which will be submitting to your Board in the not too distant future.³¹

More About the Language of Love

The good-humoured truce with the Establishment would not last long. In July 1974 two plain-clothed policemen, Chief Inspector Smith and Police Sergeant Collins entered the Jacey cinema on Charing Cross Road, where *More About the Language of Love* had already been playing to audiences five times a day for six weeks. According to Chief Inspector Smith's account 'The cinema has a seedy air entirely in keeping with its clientele and the films they come to watch'.³² The entire front of the cinema was covered in a poster of the word 'Sweden', and the pillars were decorated with the title: *More About the Language of Love*. Further posters were on display in the lobby, featuring claims that the film 'visually shows the intimacies of love', and that it is 'sex education in the Swedish manner; frank, forthright and explicit'. Another poster exclaimed: 'New from Sweden. . . Fully explains sex techniques for the handicapped. . . If you've seen *The Language of Love* you'll want to see *More About the Language of Love*'.

After buying their tickets, priced 99p each, the two policemen entered the auditorium where the usherette asked, 'Why do you want to see this film? It's sex, sex, sex all the time'. 'Is that so?', Smith replied. 'She even puts it in her mouth', was the response. They took their seats in the balcony of the cinema, the auditorium of which could accommodate up to 500 people. They found the audience mostly consisted of men alone or in groups, although there were a few couples. There were even tourists, 'including Indians and Chinese'. After a short Castrol-sponsored film about motor racing, *More About the Language of Love* began, and Smith and Collins sat through the entire screening, noting that the audience of around 250 were talking amongst themselves during the medical discussions. However, when 'sexual activity was shown, there was utter silence'; the audience viewed in 'rapt attention'. C.I. Smith completed his detailed report with his view that the film was 'criminally obscene'.³³

The film in question, *More About the Language of Love*, starred sex therapist Maj-Brith Bergström-Walan alongside Danish expert therapists Inge and Sten Hegeler; the latter couple were become familiar names in the UK following the successful 1970 publication of their book *The XYZ of Love* (fig. 1). During the course of the film these experts discuss various sex-related problems and issues including venereal disease, sex education, impotence, the sex

lives of the handicapped and homosexuality. These discussions are interspersed with documentary footage and depictions of sex, some of which considerably more explicit than had previously been deemed acceptable in British cinemas – they included close-ups of diseased genitalia, and blind children being encouraged to feel the sexual organs of naked male and female models. What pushed the film into ‘criminally obscene’ territory was the final few minutes, where a young couple enjoy unsimulated oral sex, masturbation and penetration. In the narrative, this scene is designed to demonstrate how happy one can be when free from the sexual problems and hang-ups discussed in the preceding eighty minutes. A voiceover justifies the scene’s inclusion by stating that ‘We focus on two things: One is tolerance for everything human, every variation, every form, every dialect of the language of love. The other thing is that “tenderness” is the most important word in this language’.³⁴

More About the Language of Love had first been submitted to the BBFC on 24 October 1972. Stephen Murphy, the new Secretary of the Board, explained, ‘The Board declined to issue a certificate. The film was re-submitted in a reduced version on the 18th of December, 1973 and the Board continued to decline certification’.³⁵ Unfortunately, the original documentation relating to the film has been lost from the BBFC archives,³⁶ but their objections were summarised later as being ‘not to the explicit nature of the final sequence but ranged vaguely around a feeling [Stephen Murphy] evidently had that some sequences were exploitative rather than educational in intent, meaning that he felt that they were included for sexual stimulation rather than instruction’.³⁷ A few years later, in a letter to a Conservative MP working on a bill related to film censorship, James Ferman, who would later succeed Murphy as Secretary of the BBFC, described his own position:

[*Language of Love*] is, in fact, a quite moral one, since it is concerned primarily to encourage happy marriages and its message is a plea for tenderness in sexual relationships and for greater understanding by men of the needs of women... I have far less sympathy for the ‘MORE ABOUT’ film, since its motives seem to me decidedly more prurient.³⁸

The Chairman of the GLC Film Viewing Board – the body responsibly for considering films and granting certificates – was Labour councillor Enid Wistrich, who had been appointed in 1973. One of her first actions as Chairman had been to undertake a study as to whether film censorship was even necessary, as she felt that cinema ought to be on the same footing as literature and the theatre, where pre-censorship had been abolished in the 1960s.

A meeting of the Film Viewing Board was held on 20 March 1974 to discuss *More About the Language of Love*, following a screening. Opinions were divided, as might have been expected:

Like debates in Sweden,³⁹ the educational nature of the film was questioned by some. Revealing the left-wing nature of the GLC at the time, one member suggested that the film be given an 'AA' certificate, provided a full description of the film was accompanying each screening, and this suggestion was seconded. Another member countered this by saying the film was 'not pretty', and they did not want fourteen-year-olds seeing such things, whilst another said it would be dangerous for children of fourteen to see without adult guidance. One member felt that the film made treatment of V.D. seem too easy, and was therefore misleading. Positive points were raised however, including the fact that the discussion of impotence was handled well.

Whilst not doubting its merits as an educational film for teenagers, Enid Wistrich felt awarding an 'AA' would have been viewed as outrageous by the public, given the explicit sexual content. A vote was taken initially as to whether they ought to grant *More About the Language of Love* an 'AA' certificate, but this vote was split so they voted again as to the awarding of an 'X'. Six were for an 'X', and four were against, with one abstention. Only one member seemed to realise just how controversial this decision would prove to be, worrying that the council 'will get clobbered' for this decision, and it was agreed that they ought to be ready to defend it.⁴⁰

The GLC had been under a lot of criticism for passing films that had been rejected, that they were opening the floodgates to 'great tides of filth and porn',⁴¹ but this was something Enid Wistrich doubted. She later made the point that between May 1973 and October 1974 only twenty films were given an 'X' certificate, and of those only twelve had been screened publicly by the end of 1975. As she explained, 'Patrons are not so enthusiastic about poorly made sexploitation films and Kung Fu sagas as the moralist fear. Who has ever seen a queue outside a Soho sex film cinema?'⁴²

Despite the 'X' certificate, which ought to have acted as a protection for the Jacey cinema and all those concerned, Raymond Blackburn, a disgraced former-MP-turned-moralist-

campaigner, took up the Swedish film as a crusade. In July 1974 he twice visited the Jacey cinema on the Charing Cross Road to see *More About the Language of Love*; once on his own and again with his friend and fellow moralist Lord Longford, campaigner for the Nationwide Festival of Light, a movement actively fighting the 'permissive society'. Blackburn's feelings towards this sort of film were clear: 'No man is in fact incorruptible. . . If a film were to influence only two or three persons to become dangerous sexual perverts, the consequences for innocent persons and perhaps young persons contaminated as a result might be unthinkable'. Although freely partaking of the 'media harm' discourse, he himself felt incorruptible, admitting: 'I have seen blue films in Amsterdam. Some of the sequences in this film would form part of such blue films'.⁴³

Although he had not accompanied Lord Longford on his fact-finding trip to Copenhagen in August 1971 to 'sample the sexual entertainments in this totally liberated city',⁴⁴ Blackburn had clearly followed Lord Longford's example in travelling overseas to sample European pornography.⁴⁵ Gyles Brandreth, then a junior member of the Longford Commission, wrote an account of the Copenhagen visit for women's magazine *Nova*, describing that 'Lord L's sole reaction is disgust, no more, no less. The rest of us aren't sure that disgust is a very useful reaction. This is where two very different outlooks begin to emerge. He sees the problem in black and white, while I think the rest of us can detect a certain amount of shading'.⁴⁶ Longford described to him one late-night visit to a sex club, in shocked terms: 'We were placed in the front row and, almost as soon as we arrived, a naked girl approached me with a whip. She used the whip to caress the top of my head and then looped it around my neck. . . I had to get out and I did. Don't think me faint-hearted, Gyles. I had seen enough for science and more than enough for enjoyment'.⁴⁷

Lord Longford's preoccupation with pornography was an enduring part of his political life. He delivered a long speech in the House of Lords in 1971 entitled 'Pornography in Britain', where he raised his concerns: 'Pornography, in my conviction, has increased, is increasing and ought to be diminished. That is my profound conviction'.⁴⁸ He singled out *Language of Love* when raising the problems of controlling censorship:

For example, there is a film showing in London now, and I understand it is showing elsewhere, called *The Language of Love* [sic], which displays the full sex act explicitly. A Censorship Board would still place a ban on that kind of thing, and in fact the Board did not give a licence to *The Language of Love*[sic]; it was refused a licence by the

Film Censorship Board but granted one by the G.L.C. So when we are trying to find out who are the people who have allowed all this kind of thing to appear on the screen or elsewhere, we must carry out our inquiry quite fully. It may be we have to blame the Government, the state of the law, the censor, or the G.L.C. or other local authorities. But at any rate, let us try to find who are responsible for this situation in which we find ourselves.⁴⁹

The Longford Commission published its report in September 1972⁵⁰ and received a lot of press attention, becoming a best-seller in the process. John Trevelyan described the book as ‘a curious document which in its 500 pages ranged from prejudiced subjective judgements unsupported by evidence to an objective and scholarly appendix by an expert psychologist’.⁵¹ This final section ‘effectively demolishes the whole of the preceding report showing that there is very little evidence at all as to the effects of pornography. . . in the final analysis, the Longford report on pornography is no more than an essay in dogmatism’.⁵² The younger members of the commission felt the same way, seeing Lord Longford’s research and work for what it was: a moral crusade rather than an objective enquiry. The press had already begun reporting of a split in the commission when they returned from their fact-finding visit to Copenhagen the year before. As Gyles Brandreth told *The Times*, ‘I believe that there is something to be said for introducing in Britain, perhaps not for some years and with far stricter application of the law than in Denmark, the present Danish pornography laws’. Longford’s response was to state that not all Danish experts agreed that these laws had resulted in a fall in the number of reported sex crimes.⁵³ (In *More About the Language of Love*, Sten Hegeler claims that sex crimes in Denmark fell by 20-30 per cent since pornography was legalised.)

In addition, perhaps with his whip-related experience in mind, Lord Longford stated that ‘If people in Britain could actually see these live sex shows – particularly the ones involving participation of the audience – I am certain that they would think twice before allowing such extreme liberalisation of the law’.⁵⁴ Brandreth seemed to have some sympathy with this argument when he quipped, ‘I think the best cure for those with an urge for pornography is to see a live sex show. No one who has would want to see another’.⁵⁵

The Trial

It was Raymond Blackburn’s complaint to the police in July 1975 which triggered the *More About the Language of Love* prosecution trial, with charges being made against three people or groups; Jacey (London) Ltd., which owned the cinema itself, Fancy Associates, which dealt with the programming, and Lionel Parsons, the cinema manager. The distribution

company, Grand National Ltd., which had originally submitted the film to the BBFC for certification, were not charged with any offence. On Saturday 10 August 1974, the print of *More About the Language of Love* was seized by Chief Inspector Smith at the Jacey cinema. After being informed by Lionel Parsons that the film was screened under instruction from Fancey Associates, who leased the cinema from Jacey, he travelled up to Birmingham to speak to George Cohen, manager of Jacey (London) Ltd. Cohen explained that he had a 'gentleman's agreement' with Fancey Associates – there was no formal contract. When asked if he had ever seen the film *More About the Language of Love*, Cohen replied he had not, but had been informed by an employee 'that the ten minutes he had seen was degrading'.⁵⁶

Three days later C.I. Smith visited Olive Negus-Fancey, manager of Fancey Associates. She explained to Smith how this 'gentleman's agreement', known in the business as four-wallings, worked: 'We pay to Jacey a guaranteed sum of money each week whether the film makes a profit or not and then they have a percentage over and above this'.⁵⁷ This arrangement meant that Jacey had no control over what was shown, and Fancey either provided films from their own catalogue of titles or from other independent distributors. Negus-Fancey admitted that she had not seen *More About the Language of Love* either, but did not feel that it was necessary given that the film had received an 'X' certificate from the GLC.

Regina vs Jacey (London) Ltd, Lionel Parsons and Fancey Associates Ltd was held at the Central Criminal Court 2 – 5 June 1975, with the Hon. Gwyn Morris QC presiding. The charge: the defendants 'did unlawfully and scandalously show to those members of the public who had paid for admission. . . a film entitled 'More About the Language of Love' which depicted a number of grossly indecent performances thereby outraging public decency'.⁵⁸ The defence lawyer felt the case was unfair from the beginning as the defendants had all acted within the law, in that the film had received a certificate from the licensing authority. If they were to be found guilty this case would have serious implications for the whole system of British film censorship. He also tried to appeal to a sense of local pride when he stated, 'Film cannot outrage persons of London. We live in a plural society where minorities are tolerated and the film makes a contribution to public decency'.⁵⁹ Proving that something was indecent according to law was not going to be an easy task. The Home Secretary, Roy Jenkins, had recently admitted 'the complete impossibility of giving any sensible definition of "indecenty"'.⁶⁰

More About the Language of Love was screened in full to the jury in the courtroom. Following the judge's closing remarks it took the jury just forty minutes to return a verdict of guilty⁶¹. Judge Morris, who during his summing up of the case had clearly revealed his own distaste for the film, stated 'I entirely agree with the jury's verdict and thank them in the name of the public'.⁶² Both Jacey and Fancey Associates were fined £500 each and the cinema manager Lionel Parsons was fined £50.

Conclusion

Despite the controversy, British film censorship survived this case relatively unscathed. In his summation of the then current poor state of film legislation, Geoff Robertson pointed out:

There is an urgent need to rationalise recent developments in film censorship. Either give the BBFC exclusive statutory responsibility for all films imported, made or screened in England, or else abolish it entirely, along with local viewing committees, Customs and common law offences and private prosecutions, and make all films subject to the Obscene Publications Act. Otherwise the smell of burning celluloid will soon be unbearably pungent.⁶³

This was arguably a sensible suggestion which would have prevented further private prosecutions being made against the industry by campaigners like Mary Whitehouse and Raymond Blackburn, but no such legal move was made. This case could have triggered an overhaul of the censorship system, particularly when a guilty verdict had confirmed to the BBFC that they were right to reject the film in the first place, to avoid any such obscenity charges. The archival evidence is unclear as to why this case did not have legal implications regarding future film censorship: Wistrich tried, and failed, to abolish film censorship at the GLC, and shortly thereafter resigned her post on the Film Viewing Board. Blackburn attempted to have obscenity charges made against other films, including the original *Language of Love*. The BBFC continued to function in the same way, requesting cuts or refusing certificates to anything they deemed 'obscene'. Despite all the publicity and debate, in other words, film censorship in the United Kingdom carried on as it had before the case.

Swedish sex education documentaries' presence in British cinemas did not herald a flood of pornography, campaigners had feared. Despite being available in private cinema clubs and on 8mm loops available from mail order pornographers like John Lindsay, hardcore pornography remained illegal in the United Kingdom until 2000, although the introduction of the 'R18' certificate in 1982 had already allowed for more explicit material to be sold in licenced sex shops.⁶⁴ The introduction of VHS in the 1980s would go on to have a more

significant and far-reaching impact on the public and on the policies of the BBFC than Swedish sex education ever did.

The impact of this case on the Fancey family was also minimal. They continued to operate as a group of companies for another few years, importing and occasionally producing films, although they never repeated the commercial success of *Emmanuelle*. E.J. Fancey died in 1980, and his son Malcolm Fancey, having produced films for David Hamilton Grant, became the latter's business partner and co-founded World of Video 2000. The pair would achieve notoriety in 1984 through another obscenity charge, this time over the distribution of an uncut version of *Nightmares in a Damaged Brain* (1981, Romano Scavolini, USA/ Italy: Goldmine Productions) on home video. Grant was sentenced to eighteen months in prison and Fancey was given a suspended sentence.⁶⁵

The archival material related to this case reveals information that would otherwise be lost, most importantly, the eye-witness testimony from a film screening at the Jacey cinema, which provides historians with an exceptional and rare level of detail. Among this material are hints that the films had already been altered, possibly by the distributor themselves, Grand National, prior to being submitted to the BBFC and GLC. The reference to 'making love in boots' in the BBFC examiner's eye-witness report of a *Language of Love* screening suggests that a scene was added to the film that did not exist in the original. There is no such scene in *Language of Love*, but there is in the fourth film in the series, *Love-Play: That's How We Do It. . .* (*Kär lek - så gör vi. Brev till Inge och Sten*,⁶⁶1972, Sweden: Inge Ivarson Filmproductions,) which features sequence of a young couple having sex in the shower wearing rubber boots and raincoats. It is possible that this was spliced in to the print of *Language of Love* to fill out the running time when something else had been removed, although as that latter film was not released until 1972, this scenario may be unlikely.

More About the Language of Love appears to have had at least one scene removed as well as some added. The original Swedish release featured a scene of two homosexual men having sex in a small flat. The film was written about in detail by the many participants of this case and it seems unlikely, especially given the prevailing sexual mores, that all of them would neglect to mention such a sequence. Similarly, there is footage in the original film of a show in a Danish sex club complete with audience participation, which also seemed to be missing in this 1974 British print. In one witness statement an 'unhealthy' scene featuring primitive

jungle dancing complete with a mock witch doctor, ostrich and people with painted skin, contained an 'erotic sexuality [which] tended to dredge up ancient, atavistic memories of long forgotten ferocity and lust'.⁶⁷ No other archival account refers to this scene, which given that there was only one print of this film being shown in this one cinema, is peculiar. If this scene did exist in the *More About the Language of Love*, it was most likely inserted by the distributor from another film in their possession, perhaps to fill the running time following the removal of the scenes mentioned earlier. Although these are minor details, this case provides a concrete historical example of something which Eric Schaefer described as a common practice amongst the American exploitation films of the 1930s and 1940s, which often 'eschewed the 'style' of the classical Hollywood cinema (continuity editing, spatial and temporal coherence, etc.) and the rhetorical or categorical logic of most documentaries'.⁶⁸

This article has illustrated how public concerns surrounding sexual representation connect to contemporary political, moral and socio-economic issues. The popularity of these Swedish films demonstrates that British film distributors were only too happy to provide sex films within the sometimes-ambiguous strictures of the law, and these films played a significant role within a wider public discourse on censorship and morality. British distributors' exploitation of European adult dramas and comedies of the late 1950s and early 1960s in British cinemas provided the industrial pipeline and consumer demand for more explicit, yet still legal, material, needs later met by experimenting with the distribution of Scandinavian sex education films. British distributors happily decontextualised European sex education films from domestic discourses on public health. They foregrounded recreational and salacious sexuality, not to mention the popular imagination of Swedishness, in an effort to attract eager British cinemagoers.

Elisabet Björklund has noted that in the 1940s and 1950s Swedish sex education films were negative in tone, dealing with the risks of venereal disease and unwanted pregnancy, whereas the *Language of Love* series embodied the search for a better sex life, with a 'predominant theme concerned with helping people solve problems in their sexual lives so that they can achieve pleasure and orgasm'.⁶⁹ This shift in tone from danger to self-fulfilment must be understood in light of progressive 1960s Swedish politics, a context that contrasts sharply with the sexual attitudes being expressed in the public sphere of the United Kingdom. British films, regardless of genre, most often couched their sexual exploits in a moral trajectory by which promiscuity led to an unhappy narrative conclusion.⁷⁰ *Language of Love* and its ilk, in

contrast, presented sex as a mutually pleasurable, cooperative experience based on couples working through their psychological issues and understanding physiological facts and processes. With a decided lack of moral judgment that upset anti-pornography campaigners perhaps as much as the explicit material itself, the Swedish exemplars offered British audiences a fresh sense of freedom and sexual optimism.

Caption for Fig. 1

Fig. 1: 1981 English language edition of *The XYZ of Love*, Hegeler, Inge and Sten, first published in 1970. St Albans: Granada Publishing. The book provides answers to hundreds of questions on a range of sexual topics.

¹ 'More About the Language of Love', Tony Crawley, *Cinema X*, Vol. 6 No. 11 1974, London: Top Sellers Ltd., p.22.

² Enid Wistrich, *'I don't mind the sex it's the violence': Film Censorship Explored*, London: Marion Boyars, 1978, p. 34.

³ Ibid., p. 19.

⁴ Quoted in Linda Williams, *Hardcore: Power, Pleasure and the 'Frenzy of the Visible'*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989, p. 5.

⁵ Ibid., p. 279.

⁶ Laura Mulvey 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,' *Screen* 16.3 (1975), p. 6-18.

⁷ Eric Schaefer, "'I'll Take Sweden'": The Shifting Discourse of the "Sexy Nation" in Sexploitation Films', in Eric Schaefer, (ed.), *Sex Scene: Media and the Cultural Revolution*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014, p. 208.

⁸ Ibid., p. 210.

⁹ Quoted in Lucy Mazdon & Catherine Wheatley, *French Film in Britain: Sex, Art and Cinephilia*, Oxford: Berghahn, 2013, p. 123-24.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 88.

¹¹ Carl Marklund, 'Hot Love and Cold People: Sexual Liberalism as Political Escapism in Radical Sweden', *Nordeuropa Forum*, January 2009, <http://edoc.hu-berlin.de/nordeuropaforum/2009-1/marklund-carl-83/PDF/marklund.pdf>, 2009, p.85.

¹² Schaefer, "'I'll Take Sweden'", p. 230.

¹³ 'Oswalt Kolte: Das Wunder der Liebe (The Wonder of Love)', *Monthly Film Bulletin*,

August 1969, p.180.

¹⁴ BBFC Archive, *Language of Love* file, John Trevelyan's written account of the meeting held on 20 January 1969.

¹⁵ BBFC Archive, *Language of Love* file, letter from John Trevelyan to those who attended the screening of *The Wonder of Love*, dated 21 January 1969.

¹⁶ The tagline from the Darville Organisation quad poster for *Language of Love*, London Metropolitan Archives. The council did not approve this tagline and a new poster was issued.

¹⁷ According to Elisabet Björklund, *The Most Delicate Subject: A History of Sex Education Films in Sweden*, Lund: Lund University Press, 2012.

¹⁸ BBFC Archive, *Language of Love* file, letter to John Trevelyan from Ove Wallius, dated 9 February 1970.

¹⁹ BBFC Archive, *Language of Love* file, undated BBFC examiners notes but most likely from a screening on 26 October 1970.

²⁰ London Metropolitan Archives, letter from John Trevelyan to E.W. Newberry of the GLC Licensing department, 18 November, 1970.

²¹ BBFC Archive, *Language of Love* file, letter from John Trevelyan to Cambridge Council, 17 March 1971.

²² Letter from the GLC to the BBFC, 21 December 1970.

²³ John Trevelyan, *What the Censor Saw*, London: Michael Joseph, 1973, p.120.

²⁴ Marjorie Bilbow, "Language of Love", *Today's Cinema*, 5 February, 1971, p. 9.

²⁵ F. Maurice Speed, *What's On In London* (date unknown), p.11.

²⁶ BBFC Archive, *Language of Love* file, letter from John Trevelyan to Swedish Filmproduction Investment, dated 13 May 1971.

²⁷ BBFC Archive, *Language of Love* file, censors report, 17 June 1971.

²⁸ BBFC Archive, *Language of Love* file, censors report, 17 June 1971.

²⁹ Figures taken from BBFC Archive, *Language of Love* file, letter from Ronald Wilson at Grand National Film Distributors to Stephen Murphy, 8 March 1973.

³⁰ Statistics taken from documents in BBFC Archive, *Language of Love* file.

³¹ BBFC Archive, *Language of Love* file, letter from Ronald Wilson to Stephen Murphy, 13 July 1973. This letter also demonstrates the sense of humour one perhaps needed to survive classification battles such as this.

³² All quotations and references to testimony are taken from the original court documents held at the National Archives, DPP/2/5458.

³³ National Archives, DPP/2/5458 Chief Inspector Smith official witness statement, 27 July 1974.

³⁴ Taken from the closing narration of *More About the Language of Love*.

³⁵ National Archives, DPP/2/5458, Stephen Murphy Witness Statement, 10 December 1974.

³⁶ Nevertheless references to the film and the legal case exist in the BBFC Archive, *Language of Love* file.

³⁷ Wistrich, 'I don't mind the sex it's the violence', p. 34-35.

³⁸ BBFC Archive, *Language of Love* file, letter dated 1 July 1977, letter from James Ferman to Mark Carlisle Esq MP.

³⁹ See Björklund, *The Most Delicate Subject*, p.183.

⁴⁰ London Metropolitan Archives, *More About the Language of Love* file, Film Viewing

Board minutes, 20 March 1974.

⁴¹ Wistrich, *I don't mind the sex it's the violence*, p.38.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ National Archives, DPP/2/5458, Raymond Blackburn's first letter to the police, 23 July, 1974.

⁴⁴ Trevelyan, *What the Censor Saw*, p. 144.

⁴⁵ Gyles Brandreth confirms that Blackburn was not part of the commission's visit to Copenhagen (email correspondence with the author, 24 February, 2017).

⁴⁶ Gyles Brandreth, 'A Secret Diary on Lord Longford's Committee', *Nova*, January 1972, p. 26.

⁴⁷ Gyles Brandreth, *Something Sensational to Read in the Train: The Diary of a Lifetime*, London: John Murray, 2009, p.245.

⁴⁸ 'Pornography in Britain', 21 April 1971, Hansard, vol. 317, cols. 639-754, col. 641.

⁴⁹ Ibid. col. 646. Border Films toyed with the idea of using extracts from this speech in publicity materials for *Language of Love*, and contacted the GLC, who advised against it.

⁵⁰ *Pornography: The Longford Report*, London: Coronet, 1972.

⁵¹ Trevelyan, *What the Censor Saw*, p. 145.

⁵² Bernard Levin, *The Observer*, as quoted in *ibid*.

⁵³ 'Lord Longford denies reports of "furious row"', *The Times*, 27 August 1971, p.1.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ 'Divided views of Longford team', *The Times*, 26 August 1971, p.4.

⁵⁶ National Archives, DPP/2/5458, Statement of Witness, 12 August 1974.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ National Archives, DPP/2/5458, trial transcript, 2 – 5 June 1975

⁵⁹ National Archives, DPP/2/5458, trial transcript, 2 – 5 June 1975

⁶⁰ *Hansard*, May 1974, as quoted in Geoff Robertson, 'Film Censorship Merry-Go-Round', *New Statesman*, 28 June 1974, p.912.

⁶¹ Nicholas De Jongh, 'Censor overruled on indecent film', *The Guardian*, 6 June 1975, p. 1.

⁶² National Archives, DPP/2/5458, trial transcript

⁶³ Robertson, 'Film Censorship Merry-Go-Round', *New Statesman*, 28 June 1974, p.914.

⁶⁴ Robin Duval, 'The Last Days of the Board', in Edward Lamberti, *Behind the Scenes at the BBFC: Film Classification from the Silver Screen to the Digital Age*, London: BFI/ Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, p. 147.

⁶⁵ David Cross, 'Distributor jailed in horror video test case', *The Times*, 4 Feb 1984, p.3.

⁶⁶ A direct translation is 'Love Games – so do we. Letters to Inge and Sten', and refers to their popular Danish newspaper column and the printed collection *The XYZ of Love*, Hegeler, Inge and Sten, St Albans: Granada Publishing, 1970.

⁶⁷ Observed by one Dr. Linklater in a letter intended to be used in expert witness testimony for the prosecution (National Archives, DPP/2/5458, 7 August 1974).

⁶⁸ Eric Schaefer *'Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!'* *A History of Exploitation Films, 1919-1959*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999, p.5.

⁶⁹ Björklund, *The Most Delicate Subject*, p.201.

⁷⁰ See, for example, *Loving Feeling* (1968, Norman J. Warren, UK: Piccadilly Pictures) or *Permissive* (1970, Lindsay Shonteff, UK: Lindsay Shonteff Film Productions Ltd). *Cool It*

Carol (1970, Pete Walker, UK: Pete Walker Productions) was one of the first significant films to depict young people returning to their normal lives unscathed following various forms of sexual experimentation, including pornography and prostitution.